

Writing a Great Research Paper: Finding the Best Sources *Study Guide*

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Writing a Great Research Paper: Finding the Best Sources

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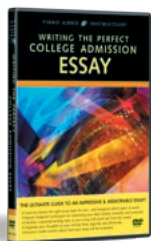
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Writing a Great Research Paper: Finding the Best Sources Study Guide

Introduction

In this extraordinary program, you'll learn to master both Internet- and library-based research techniques. Along the way, a research expert reveals the insider secrets that every student must know for using search engines, catalogs, and reference books—and the tips and tricks that greatly improve your chances of finding information that's appropriate, reliable, in-depth, and truly useful!

For easier studying and maximum success, we recommend that you view the program over a number of short sessions: don't try to absorb too much at one time. Review the entire program, or specific sections, as many times as you find necessary in order to master the material.

Perhaps most importantly: Don't forget to take advantage of your "pause" button while viewing the program. Keep plenty of scrap paper handy so you can jot down ideas, work through concepts, and more. And finally, be sure to use the myriad on-screen graphics to take notes for yourself—when you're done, you'll have a notebook you can refer back to again and again.

About Your Instructor

Karl Weber, M.A., is an educator, editor, and bestselling author in fields ranging from business to politics to test preparation. He has worked on books with such noted figures as management guru Adrian Slywotzky, Loews Hotels CEO Jonathan M. Tisch, and President Jimmy Carter.

Part 1: Traditional Research Techniques

Use the preliminary bibliography you created in *Writing a Great Research Paper: Starting Your Research* to investigate additional sources. Then use these additional sources to locate even more sources. In this way, you'll begin to compile an expanded bibliography of sources—of course, as you compile your list, be sure to capture all of the pertinent bibliographical data.

To determine whether or not a particular source is worthy of your trust, consult the next program in this series: *Writing a Great Research Paper: Plagiarism & Other Pitfalls*.

Part 2: Using Bibliographies

Remember: Annotated bibliographies, which offer synopses and evaluations of other source materials, can be especially helpful. Also, don't forget to read the front matter of a bibliography: It can actually help you save time in your research!

Part 3: Using Periodical Indexes

Ask your reference librarian how your library handles indexes for the magazines, journals, and other periodicals that relate to your topic. If these indexes are available via an online catalog, before you start searching, be sure to read any instructions, tutorials, FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), or other HELP materials that are provided. You might even wish to ask the reference librarian for a quick introduction.

Part 4: A Prelude to Online Research

Before you continue, it's a very good idea to ask your teachers or professors exactly how they feel about online research sources. Do they prefer that only a certain fraction of your research paper's citations comprise online research sources? Do they prefer that you use online research sources from a certain group of websites only? Do they prefer that you trust online research sources only when the sources appeared in printed form as well? As with most research paper issues, asking your teachers or professors for guidance shows your forethought, thoroughness, and your commitment to "getting it right"—a few quick conversations can really help boost your grade.

As you know, sometimes it's tough to gauge how accurate, objective, thorough, or well-edited a particular Internet resource is. Therefore, we'd like to offer the following mantra: **When in doubt? Check it offline!** Before you trust any information you find in an online resource, it's a good idea to make sure that the same information has also been published in one or more reputable printed sources. Of course, this means checking any facts (names, dates, places, etc.—the details of who, what, when, where, why, and how), but it also means establishing the veracity of any ideas (interpretations, opinions, analyses, theories, etc.) that you encounter online. The bottom line: If you can't locate a given piece of information in a single reputable printed source, it almost certainly doesn't belong in your research paper.

Part 5: Internet Search Strategies

Search Engines

Remember: Every search engine uses its own method for handling query strings, ranking results, etc.! So before you start searching in any search engine, be sure to read any instructions, tutorials, FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), or other HELP materials that are provided.

Also, whenever possible, use **quotation marks** around exact phrases and proper names! This is a great habit to develop because it can really help focus your search results.

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Four of the most popular search engines are:

- Google™ [google.com]
- Yahoo!® [yahoo.com]
- Windows Live™ Search [live.com]
- Ask.com™ [ask.com]

Some other search engines and meta search engines (i.e., search engines that combine the results of numerous other search engines) are:

- AltaVista™ [altavista.com]
- Alexa® [alexa.com]
- Gigablast [gigablast.com]
- LookSmart® [looksmart.com]
- Dogpile® [dogpile.com]
- AlltheWeb [alltheweb.com]
- MetaCrawler® [metacrawler.com]

There are hundreds of search engines, directories, and other websites that can prove helpful for research papers. Some of the more popular sites are:

- Google™ Scholar [scholar.google.com]
- The Internet Public Library [ipl.org]
- Answers.com™ [answers.com]
- Dictionary.com™ [dictionary.com]
- Thesaurus.com™ [thesaurus.com]
- Wikipedia® [wikipedia.org]
- Google™ News [news.google.com]
- RefDesk™ [refdesk.com]
- The Library of Congress [loc.gov]
- Information Please® [infoplease.com]
- Librarians' Internet Index [lii.org]
- Digital Librarian [digital-librarian.com]

If you have any difficulty searching in any website using its own search engine, you might try using "site:" to let Google (or another search engine that supports "site:") give the searching a try. For example, in Google, you could limit your search to the Library of Congress just by including "site:loc.gov" in your query string:

"Thomas Edison" site:loc.gov

Also, here's a timesaver: Most modern web browsers feature a built-in query box for the more common search engines; it's usually a small box in the upper right-hand corner of your browser window. You just choose the search engine you wish to use, enter your query string, and go! Using this feature means you don't have to revisit a search engine's home page each time you want to enter a new query.

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Boolean Searches

For your reference, here's a recap of our technique for structuring complex searches:

In a "pure" Boolean search engine:

```
(yes AND yes) NOT (no OR no) AND (maybe OR maybe OR maybe)
```

In Google™ (simplified Boolean):

```
yes yes -no -no maybe OR maybe OR maybe
```

Remember: Many search engines have "Advanced" versions that allow you to apply Boolean logic by using a form. (You can usually just click on a link labeled something like "Advanced" or "Advanced Search" on the home page of these search engines.) Some of the more popular "Advanced" search engines are:

- Google™ Advanced [google.com/advanced_search]
- Yahoo!® Advanced [search.yahoo.com/web/advanced]
- AltaVista™ Advanced [altavista.com/web/adv]
- Alexa® Advanced [alexa.com/site/ds/advanced]
- Dogpile® Advanced [dogpile.com/info.dogpl/search/advanced/web.htm]

Part 6: More Internet Search Strategies

Including a number in your query string can prove tremendously helpful; it only returns results that include that specific number. This is especially helpful with **years**! Also, many search engines can use number ranges, wildcards, etc. to help you execute simpler searches.

Don't forget about Google™ Images [images.google.com] and other search engines that focus on locating images! Sometimes a graph, chart, map, diagram, etc. can help you spot an interesting trend or feature that can turn into a great research question.